

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Board melds fax with computer

Twenty years ago, the transmission of documents via facsimile machine was the hottest thing going.

Like tail fins on old cars from that generation, such machinery, fax for short, is long overdue for some streamlining.

The growing popularity of personal computers is now offering an alternative to this equipment. Fax is no longer the only easy way to send those hurry-up documents across town or around the world. In fact, it's not even the best way.

With most offices now equipped with at least some kind of PC, the obvious choice for quick, inexpensive transmission of text is to send the document directly from one PC to the other. But don't despair: For those with a deep attachment to



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the fax process — and the need to transmit non-text data such as charts, diagrams or drawings — there is a way to integrate that old familiar fax into your speedy new PC.

Called Fax Partner, it's a nifty little expansion board that slips into a PC and transforms it into a self-contained fax machine. Available from Panasonic Industrial Co. of Secaucus, N.J., Fax Partner offers an excellent alternative to the stand-alone facsimile system, with some distinct advantages.

■ First, there's the matter of cost. At \$999, Fax Partner is more than competitive with comparable stand-alone systems going for nearly twice that figure.

■ When transmitting text only, Fax Partner can be the speediest,

most efficient transmitter you've ever experienced. Some units can double as a modem, transmitting a full page in as little as 10 seconds while eliminating the costly and time-consuming need to re-input text into your PC after receiving it on a stand-alone fax. In fact, if both parties agree to use the same word-processing program, all the formatting codes can be transmitted along with the text — saving literally hours of work on both ends.

■ Fax Partner provides the capability of sending or receiving documents while a PC is being used in other operations. An especially handy feature is a small lighted fixture that attaches to the front of a computer to signal when the machine is sending or receiving.

■ Fax Partner appears to be compatible with backup products, as well as with the operation of other computers on a network. It is

not, however, intended for access by other networked computers.

■ The documentation is clear and easy to understand, and the menus presented for each function are simple to follow.

A couple of negatives should be noted. One primary consideration is whether your clients have compatible equipment, or whether they are reluctant to shift from the stand-alone fax to PC transmission. Also, the frequent transmission of diagrams not already stored on a PC's hard disk will require the addition of a scanner.

And, even using a laser printer for output, I found the legibility of documents received to be inferior to a regular fax machine.

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